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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON ICRC PRISON VISITS IN UZBEKISTAN

REF: TASHKENT 324

Classified By: Political Officer Tim Buckley for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) On March 17 Charge d'Affaires and poloff met with International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Head of Regional Delegation Yves Giovannoni to get a status report on the recently announced prison visits in Uzbekistan (reftel). ICRC will only be able to visit some of the approximately 200 places of detention during the six-month trial period. The focus is presently on long-term, post-trial prisons within the penitentiary directorate (GUIN) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). As Giovannoni expected, all is going smoothly now, although he foresees difficulties in two or three months as ICRC staff attempt to access the more sensitive detention facilities administered by other agencies, including 12 under the National Security Service (NSS), to which ICRC never had access before.

¶2. (C) Short-term detentions are also possible at the 120 police stations throughout the country, where abuse of detainees after initial arrest has occurred. ICRC is planning to expand contacts with Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Alisher Sharafutdinov in order to facilitate adequate access to these facilities and to discuss appeal mechanisms for detainees. (Comment: We have found that Sharafutdinov is earnest and open to reforms; however, we have heard rumors that he will soon be named as a Deputy Prosecutor-General. This would be a promotion in rank but it could be more difficult for ICRC to deal with a successor on police and detention issues. End comment).

¶3. (C) ICRC President Jakob Kellenberger is still planning a mid-April visit, but the Government of Uzbekistan still needs to confirm a meeting with President Karimov. Giovannoni noted "it is too early to speak of success," and he recounted that ICRC visits were suspended in late 2004 -- prior to the events in Andijon. Giovannoni stressed that while the six-month trial period is a good start, the ICRC needs to stay engaged for a minimum period of 18 months to two years

in order to make a lasting impact. Giovannoni noted the Uzbeks "need some enticement," and he agreed that a carefully worded statement welcoming the agreement would be politically useful. (Comment: We believe President Karimov will grant the requested meeting with Kellenberger in order to gain political capital and highlight the renewal of prison visits, which is perhaps the most significant step forward on human rights the Government of Uzbekistan has taken in several years. End comment).

HANSON